



Forest Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

# The Trail Seasonality Forest Plan Amendment Project

The Wayne National Forest (WNF) is proposing to remove a standard from the 2006 Land and Resources Management Plan (the Forest Plan) that currently restricts the trail season. Removal of the Forest Plan standard allows for Responsible Officials to determine the appropriate closure for each trail type annually. This project requires completing an amendment to the Forest Plan. The following information is provided so you can review and comment on this proposal prior to the Forest Supervisor's decision.

## PURPOSE & NEED

Over years of implementing the 2006 Forest Plan, we have heard feedback from user groups (in particular, equestrian, mountain bike, and off-highway vehicle (OHV) riders) wishing to have more access to WNF trails in the winter and early spring. The current policy, expressed in the Forest Plan (SFW-REC-16), is to close designated trails to equestrian, mountain bike, and OHV use from December 16 - April 14. This limits these users to specific seasonal use, even if those dates fall in the middle of a weekend or weather and trail conditions would allow use prior to or after the dates without damaging resources or trail integrity.

Trail users point out that other nearby systems either do not have seasonal closures for some of these uses, have narrower or different dates, or have closures driven by conditions. Businesses closely associated with trail use have told us the four-month seasonal closure impacts their potential for growth and limits the community economic impacts trails can have. We hear complaints at the start of each riding season when April 15 falls on a Saturday or a Sunday, effectively cutting off part of weekends to public use. We have also observed that there are times at the end of the season where trails are in suitable condition for continued use.

This project responds to public desires by allowing for a longer open season for equestrian and mountain bike trails, while aligning open season for OHV trails with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources OHV trail season.

## PROPOSED ACTION

To meet the purpose and need described above, this project would remove a standard from the Forest Plan (SFW-REC-16), allowing Responsible Officials to determine the appropriate closure for each trail type annually with some expected closures each year, and quickly adjusting seasonal closure dates as needed without static closures tied to the Forest Plan.

SFW-REC-16 states, "OHV, mountain bike, and horse trails are open (unless posted closed) for riding from April 15th through December 15th. Close these trails (except for foot travel) during the winter period (December 16th through April 14th) to minimize environmental

impacts and maintenance costs. Exception: Trails may be used for administrative purposes and operation/maintenance of approved oil and gas facilities.”

For OHV trails the proposal is to establish a Forest Supervisor closure order for a new, expected closed season that aligns with the Ohio Department of Natural Resource’s seasonal closure. Currently, that is the day after the end of deer gun season to March 31. Having closures determined through a closure order, rather than a Forest Plan standard, would allow us to adjust the OHV seasonal closure dates if the state adjusts theirs or we see a need to change our dates to another closure period.

For mountain bike and equestrian trails, the proposal is to develop Forest Supervisor closure orders establishing a closed season that can be adjusted annually to allow for an extended open season or earlier openings in the spring. Generally, the trails would close on the first Monday in January and open on the first Friday in April. The season may be extended or shortened by annual Forest Order based on trail and weather conditions, volunteer capacity for trail maintenance, and monitoring in an extended season. For consideration by Line Officers in determining different closure dates:

- Existing trail conditions, as determined through trail assessments (these can pre-season assessments or fall assessments);
- Engaged trail volunteer group and/or organization that can assist with monitoring conditions, as well as trail maintenance needs; and
- Observed weather conditions at the time and predicted into the future.

General monitoring data can inform whether longer closures may be needed to protect trail integrity, or whether the closures are occurring at the right time of year.

Wider OHVs are not addressed in this project. Rather staff will examine the existing trail conditions as it pertains to conversion to wider vehicles and will explore inclusion/ownership of local communities, interest groups, clubs, and volunteers prior to developing a proposal.

## PLAN AMENDMENT PROCESS

The environmental analysis for this project will likely be completed using the following categorical exclusion: 36 CFR 220.6(e)(16) - Land management plans, plan amendments, and plan revisions developed under 36 CFR 219 et. seq., that provide broad guidance and information for project and activity decision-making.

Amending a Forest Plan has specific requirements, including providing for this 30-day comment period initiated by a legal notice in the WNF newspaper of record, *The Athens Messenger*, and a 45-day objection period on a draft decision (if applicable; initiated by a legal notice in *The Athens Messenger*) prior to a final decision being made. Planning regulations that detail these requirements can be found at 36 CFR 219

Project proposals to amend the Forest Plan must identify which of the “substantive requirements” from the planning regulations are directly related to the amendment. The “substantive requirements” are found at 36 CFR 219.8 through 36 CFR 219.11. For the Trail Seasonality Forest Plan Amendment the following “substantive requirements” are found to be directly related and will be applied:

- “Social and Economic Sustainability (36 CFR 219.8(b)(2), (3), and (6)) and
- “Multiple Use” (36 CFR 219.10(a)(10) and 36 CFR 219.10(b)(1)(i)).

Projects completed by categorical exclusion do not typically have a 30-day comment period on the analysis; however, since this project is a proposal to amend the Forest Plan, the WNF is providing more detail now on the analysis that has been completed to date. Find the additional information on the project webpage if you are interested (weblink below).

## HOW TO SUBMIT COMMENTS

You can help in the planning process by sharing any concerns or information you may have about this proposal. Your comments can be useful for us to better understand public preferences and concerns about the environment related to this proposed action. The WNF will consider your comments to inform decisions about the project.

The Trail Seasonality Forest Plan Amendment is subject to 36 CFR 219, subparts A and B. Carrie Gilbert, the Forest Supervisor, will be the responsible official for this project.

**Information about this project can be found on the USFS website at:**

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/wayne/landmanagement/projects>

**This scoping and comment period is 30 calendar days in length.** Only those who file timely, specific, written comments on this proposal will be eligible to later file an objection. Please write to show your interest if you want to remain on the mailing list but do not have comments at this time. It is useful for you to indicate whether you intend to have standing to object to the project if submitting general comments in support of the project.

**To have standing to object, you must provide the following information as part of your comments:**

- Name and address (email address is sufficient)
- Title of the project (Trail Seasonality Forest Plan Amendment)
- Specific comments on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons. If you reference any outside sources you must include the reference with your comments or provide a link to where it is available on-line.
- Signature or other verification of identity upon request

Comments can be provided by phone at 740-753-0101, or mailed to:

Wayne National Forest

Rachel Reed, Forest Environmental Coordinator

13700 US Hwy 33

Nelsonville, OH 45764

Attn: Trail Seasonality Forest Plan Amendment

Comments may also be submitted electronically by visiting the WNF’s projects website (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/wayne/landmanagement/projects>) and selecting the project name. Then select the “Comment on Project” link in the “Get Connected” group at the right-hand side of the project webpage).